

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /156 W

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R 161345Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4201

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 0275

EO 11652, GDS

TAGS: PFOR: TS

SUBJECT: REASONS BEHIND AND EFFECT OF MASMOUDI'S REMOVAL.

REF: TUNIS 234.

1. SUMMARY. BOURGUIBA'S EXPULSION OF FOREIGN MINISTER MASMOUDI SO SUDDENLY AFTER HIS HAVING ALLOWED MASMOUDI TO TAKE PROMINENT ROLE IN CEREMONY CONCERNING TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER IS BOUND TO REFLECT POORLY ON BOURGUIBA. MASMOUDI'S PUBLIC LINKING OF HIS REMOVAL WITH U.S. DISPLEASURE OVER TUNISIAN FOREIGN POLICY WILL NOT BE HELPFUL TO US. MORE IMPORTANT, DEPARTURE OF MASMOUDI DEPRIVES BOURGUIBA OF USEFUL POINT OF CONTACT WITH SUCH REFORMIST-MINDED ARAB LEADERS AS QADHAFI. MASMOUDI'S PRESENCE IN GOVERNMENT HELPED THE BOURGUIBA-TUNISIAN IMAGE IN THE MORE "RADICAL" ARAB COUNCILS, AND OFFSET BOURGUIBA'S STRONG PRO-AMERICAN BIAS. WHILE MASMOUDI MAY NOT TAKE ANY ACTION TO STIR UP TROUBLE IN TUNISIA, GROUPS WHERE HE HAS FOLLOWED MIGHT ATTEMPT SHOW THEIR DISPLEASURE TO HIS OUSTER BY DEMONSTRATING BOTH FOR MERGE

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R 161345Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4202

INFO USINT ALGIERS

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AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TUNIS 0275

6. MASMOUDI'S WILLINGNESS GIVE PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON HIS REMOVAL TO ALL JOURNALISTS BRINGS TO MIND THREAT HE MADE TO US YEAR AND HALF AGO, WHEN HE WAS IN TROUBLE OVER HANOI RECOGNITION, THAT IF BOURGUIBA DROPPED HIM HE WOULD TALK FREELY ABOUT WHEY HE REMOVED. MASMOUDI MAY THINK BOURGUIBA DOES NOT DARE MOVE AGAINST HIM AS HE DID AGAINST EITHER AHMED BEN SALAH OR AHMED MESTIRI, PERHAPS BECAUSE UNLIKE OTHER TWO MASMOUDI IS CLOSE TO BOURGUBA'S WIFE WASSILA. IN ADDITION, MASMOUDI WAS AMBASSADOR IN PARIS WHEN BOURGUIBA WAS THERE FOR 1969 ILLNESS AND AT TIME BOURGUIBA MOVED AGAINST BEN SALAH. MASMOUDI THEREFORE PROBABLY KNOWS A GREAT DEAL ABOUT BOURGUIBA THAT BOURGUIBA MIGHT NOT WANT REVEALED. (IT IS RUMORED THAT MASMOUDI'S WIFE "HAS WRITTEN" A BOOK ON THEIR LIFE IN PARIS WHICH IS STILL IN MANUSCRIPT FORM.)

7. THE EFFECT OF MASMOUDI'S REMOVAL ON QADHAFI AND THE PROSPECTS FOR UNION CAN ONLY BE SPECULATED AT PRESENT. MASMOUDI OF ALL TUNISIANS DEALING WITH LARG SEEMED TOFAVE BEST RELATIONSHIP WITH QADHAFI. WHETHER QADHAFI IS ONLY USING HIM BECAUSE OF HIS POSITION AND WILLINGNESS TO PLEAD LIBYAN CASE IN TUNISIA OR WHETHER PR HAD
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REAL PERSONAL ATTACHMENT TO MASMOUDI MAY BE IMMATERIAL. HOWEVER, WE DEFER TO EMBASSY TRIPOLI FOR JUDGMENT ON QADHAFI'S POSSIBLE REACTION TO MASMOUDI'S DEPARTURE BEING ACCOMPANIED BY SLOWDOWN IN MERGER, E.G. REFERENDUM POSTPONEMENT (SEPTEL).

8. MASMOUDI'S MAIN STRENGTH ON INTERNAL SCENE IS AMONG YOUTH, PARTICULARLY STUDENTS, AND THOSE TUNISIANS WHO FAVOR MORE GAULLIST TYPE POLICY VIS-A-VIS U.S. IF HE WISHES STIR UP TROUBLE HERE FOR GOT, HIS MOST LIKELY

AREA WOULD BE AT UNIVERSITY. HOWEVER, OUR JUDGMENT OF MASMOUDI IS HE TOO SMART TO GET INVOLVED IN INTERNAL FRACAS NOW UNLESS HE THINKS HE HAS GOOD CHANCE OF GOING ALL THE WAY. HE HAS LITTLE OR NO FOLLOWING AMONG MILITARY, AND IF HE ONLY PROVOKED A PALACE COUP, IT WOULD BE OF LITTLE OR NO BEIEFIT TO HIM UNLESS HE HAD MADE BARGAIN WITH OTHERS IN GOT OR OUTSIDE WHO COULD INFLUENCE MILITARY. AT PRESENT THIS SEEMS UNLIKELY. OTHER REMOTE POSSIBILITY IS THAT MASMOUDI COULD FOMENT TROUBLE WITH EXPECTATION QADHAFI AND LIBYAN ARMY WOULD COME TO RESCUE OF UNION, BUT THIS WOULD HAVE TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF POSSIBLE ALGERIAN REACTION.

9. CONCLUSION: BOURGUIBA'S ACTION TO REMOVE MASMOUDI SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY ILL-ADVISED AT THIS TIME. IT WILL REFLECT POORLY ON BOURGUIBA FOR HAVING AT ONE POINT ALLOWED MASMOUDI TO TAKE SPOTLIGHT IN CONNECTION WITH TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER, AND THEN TWO DAYS LATER SAVAANG HIM. FOREIGN PRESS REPORTS OF USG INVOLVEMENT IN MASMOUDI'S OUSTER WILL NOT RPT NOT HELP US BECAUSE TUNISIANS MAY SPECULATE THAT WE OPPOSE TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER AND TOOK OUR SPITE OUT ON MASMOUDI. (SINCE BOURGUIBA CALLED ME IN JUST BEFORE MASMOUDI REMOVED, TUNISIANS MIGHT ASSUME THAT I VOICED OBJECTIONS TO MERGER AND THAT THIS WAS STRAW WHICH BROKE MASMOUDI'S BACK.) KEY ROLE OF NOUIRA, WHO CONSIDERED GOOD FRIEND OF U.S., TENDS REINFORCE SPECULATION OF USG INVOLVEMENT. MORE IMPORTANT, DEPARTURE OF MASMOUDI DEPRIVES BOURGUIBA OF USEFUL PO CY OF CONTACT WITH SUCH REFORMIST-MINDED

ARAB LEADERS AS QADHAFI. HE IS WELL REGARDED IN ARAB
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CIRCLES IN GENERAL. MASMOUDI'S PRESENCE IN GOVERNMENT HELPED THE BOURGUIBA-TUNISIA IMAGE IN THE MORE "RADICAL" ARAB COUNCILS, AND OFFSET BOURGUIBA'S STRONG PRO-AMERICAN BIAS.

10. MASMOUDI'S NEAR-TERM FUTURE IS OF COURSE UNCERTAIN. HE HAS JOINED A GROUP OF FORMER COLLABORATORS OF BOURGUIBA WHO ARE NOW OUTSIDE THE GOT BUT SO FAR STILL IN THE PSD. IF HE MAINTAINS HIS PSD FUNCTION, HE MAY, LIKE AHMED MESTIRI DID IN 1971, GAIN A REAL VICTORY AT THE NEXT PSD CONGRESS, IF NOT BEFORE. HOWEVER, MUCH WILL DEPEND ON HOW BOURGUIBA REACTS TO HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS. BOURGUIBA MAY THINK MASMOUDI CAN STILL BE USEFUL TO HIM AND MAY TRY TO KEEP HIM IN THE FOLD USING PERHAPS THE INFLUENCE OF WASSILA. IF NOT, MASMOUDI COULD POSE MORE OF A THREAT TO INTERNAL STABILITY THAN BOURGUIBA HAS FACED SINCE 1969.
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